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TAGS: PGOV PREL SY LE

SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE SECGEN MOUSSA AND QATARI FM/PM HBJ
VISIT DAMASCUS TO FOLLOW-UP DOHA ACCORD

REF: DAMASCUS 357

Classified By: CDA Michael Corbin, American Embassy Damascus, Reasons 1
.4 b and d.

¶11. (C) Summary: Arab League SecGen Amre Moussa and Qatari PM/FM Hamad bin-Jasim (HBJ) met separately with President Asad on May 26 to push for Syrian moves to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon as the next step to the May 21 Doha agreement, according to a May 27 readout by the Egyptian Embassy. Bashar reportedly indicated a willingness to do so, but emphasized the need for Arab League efforts to improve Syria's relationships with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Bashar also called for Arab League support of Qatari efforts to reconcile Hamas and Fatah, with the goal of creating a unified Palestinian government. End Summary

¶12. (C) A day after the inauguration of Lebanese President Sleiman, Arab League SecGen Moussa and Qatari PM/FM HBJ arrived May 26 in Damascus for consultations with President Asad and other Syrian officials. According to a readout from the Egyptian Embassy, Moussa and HBJ each exchanged congratulations with Bashar on the Doha accord and Sleiman's election. (Moussa and HBJ also publicly credited Asad for playing a decisive role in reaching the Doha agreement.) Moussa and HBJ pressed Bashar on the importance of tangible Syrian steps to establish formal diplomatic relations, including the opening of an embassy in Beirut and the demarcation of borders. Bashar reportedly said that Sleiman's election marked a positive move to better Syrian-Lebanese relations and that Syria would be willing to take steps toward normalizing diplomatic relations in due course.

¶13. (C) In his meeting with Moussa, Bashar reportedly expressed frustration that the U.S., many Europeans, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt had ignored Syria's contribution to the Doha agreement and had failed to respond positively to the announcement of indirect Syrian-Israeli talks on the Golan. The election of a Lebanese president, establishment of a consensus government, and agreement on a new election law would not have been possible without Syria's intervention in the endgame, Bashar argued to Moussa. The result was now there should be no disagreements over Lebanon. Bashar had declared his public support for better relations with the Lebanese government, and things were moving in a positive direction. For the regional environment to improve, Syria wanted Arab League assistance in ending Syria's feud with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Moussa reportedly agreed that it was

now time to set aside differences and urged Asad to take immediate steps to normalize diplomatic relations with Lebanon as a tangible indicator of Syria's willingness to make amends. Bashar reiterated that Syria would be engaging the Lebanese government in due course.

¶4. (C) Bashar also requested Moussa's help in winning Arab League support for a Qatari initiative to unify the Palestinian government between Fatah and Hamas. Bashar argued that following up the successful Doha agreement with talks between Hamas and Fatah would reduce regional tensions and increase the likelihood of a successful two-state solution. The current situation had created a deep split among the Palestinians and within the Arab world that worked to Israel's benefit. Even the Saudis agreed that a unified Palestinian government would be necessary before real peace with Israel could be achieved. According to the Egyptians, Moussa demurred from making any commitments but said he would follow up with the Qataris.

CORBIN